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The Education of the Girl

THE NECESSITY OF FITTING HER EDUCATION
TO HER LIFE

BY

L. D. HARVEY, President

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of the

Stout Institute, Menomonie, Wis.

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The Education of the Girl

The Necessity of Fitting her Education to her Life *

Shall the Girl Have the Same Education as the Boy?

A generation ago the discussion waxed warm upon the question of the physical and mental ability of the girl to do the work prescribed for her brother in the higher educational institutions, in the same time and in the same way that he was to do it. The opening of the doors of these institutions to women on the same basis as to men, and the success of the girls in them is a sufficient indication of the answer to that question. The discussion has practically been closed. The girl has demonstrated and is demonstrating her ability to achieve success in the highest fields of educational effort. But the settlement of that question has not settled the other—whether the girl needs and should have the same education as the boy. Until very recently the organization of school systems, the framing of courses of study for elementary and secondary schools, and of the curricula of higher educational institutions have proceeded upon the assumption that the needs of the boy and the girl in education were the same, and to be met through the study of the same subjects. These subjects were chosen and their scope determined almost solely with reference to the boy. It was left for the girl to proceed along the same line if she were to proceed at all. Some men and many women have argued effectively for the right of the girl to follow in the educational footsteps of her brother—until that right has been conceded. In recent years, the question as to whether this is the only right to education possessed by the girl has been coming to the front, until today it is one of the most important questions to be considered in connection with the develop-

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ment of our educational system. Some concessions have already been made—the introduction of sewing and cooking as subjects of instruction in many public and private schools is a slight recognition of the fact that the girl needs for her training some things that have no place in the training of the boy.

Necessity for Differentiation Exists

The elective system in the higher educational institutions coupled with the conservative admission of subjects that might be attractive to girls if not to boys, and the election of these subjects by many girls, is a further recognition of this difference in needs. A serious consideration of the question discloses the fact that an adequate differentiation of the materials, means, and methods to be employed in the education of girls and boys has not yet been made. We have been for years multiplying special, technical, and professional schools of varying aim and scope to fit boys and young men for the active duties in life, growing out of changed industrial, social, commercial, and political conditions. These schools have come into existence because of the demand for that kind of education which shall fit young men to do what, by reason of their manhood, they may do, and by reason of the requirements of society needs to be done. Many of these schools throw their doors open to women, and a few women have availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded. They have not proved attractive to girls in the same measure as to boys for the reason that the world recognizes certain classes of work as peculiarly men's work, and other classes of work as peculiarly women's work. That some women and fewer men do not recognize this distinction, does not alter the situation. If a woman conceives herself able to do the work which society at large has regarded as the work of a man, she has an opportunity to fit herself for it, and if she can find employment, she is at liberty to engage in it, but the fact remains that her entrance upon this field of activity is only an incident. With the man it is a life work—with the woman it is liable to be interrupted at any time by the demands of her womanhood for home and family life. Few women have the physical and mental strength to meet the demands of the home life and the demands of a vocation or a profession outside of the home, and win success in both. That one occasionally does is no warrant for assuming that it is the general rule. That she wins success outside the home at the expense of the home life is an admission of failure.

The immense broadening of the field of educational effort for men in recent years is not an accident. It has come because we have been studying the needs of the individual, of society, and of the state. We have been finding out what a man needed to know and do in order to measure up to these demands, and have been framing courses of instruction to more definitely fit men to do this work. We need to study the question of the education of girls seriously, and from the same standpoint. What a boy needs to know and to do to fit him for success in any of the useful activities of life upon which he desires to enter is the basic element in determining the character of his education. What a woman needs to know and to do in order to meet the responsibilities that come to her in life is the basic element in determining what her education shall be. There is an immense amount of work needed to meet the needs of society that a woman cannot do and ought not to undertake, but which a man can and ought to do and do well. He should be fitted to do this work. It is a waste of time and energy to try to educate a woman for that work. There is an immense amount of work needed in the world which a woman can do and which a man cannot do and ought not to undertake. The absurdity of trying to educate him to do the work for which he is unfitted by reason of his sex has been recognized, and it has not been attempted. There are many lines of work needed to be done in the world which men and women may do equally well. Equal opportunities should be given for the education of each in the direction of efficient performance of these lines of work. In the lines of general culture and training, in so far as there can be culture without reference to efficient action, the education of men and women may be the same—but in so far as their work varies and demands special knowledge, differing in one field from that in the other, in so far as effectiveness in action depends upon special training required in one and not in the other, the necessity for differentiation exists.

Society Demands Greater Efficiency.

Today we are realizing as never before the lack of efficiency in the vast majority of those who do the work that society demands. If the possible efficiency of the farming population were realized, the products of the soil now under cultivation in the United States would be increased at least 100%. We are beginning to realize this fact, and hence the demand from all parts of the country for

the sort of education for the country boy and girl that shall hasten the development of this efficiency. The manufacturers realize the inefficiency of their employees of every grade, and these employees, if they do not fully recognize their own inefficiency, see the lack of those kinds of educational facilities, necessary to develop efficiency in their children, and they unite with the manufacturers in demanding a place for industrial education.

The great transportation companies are admitting the lack of efficiency among their operatives and are providing the educational machinery for securing it. Workers for civic and social uplift find themselves handicapped by the inefficiency of the agents through whom they must work, and in response to their call for help, educational agencies are being provided to develop competent workers in these fields.

The impulse of this awakening to the call for efficiency is felt everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the demand is becoming more insistent every day for such a broadening of educational means and ends as shall make it possible, for those who are to do the work that society needs to have done, to acquire the knowledge and training essential for efficiency in the doing. The demand is not less for the cultural element in education, not less for the highest professional and technical training for those who have the ability and inclination to secure it, but there is an added demand for the millions who have neither the ability nor the inclination to secure this training—a demand that educational effort shall be directed toward preparing these millions to do something well that needs to be done in order that they and society may both be benefited by their increased efficiency in doing. A narrow range of useful knowledge coupled with efficiency in its use is better for the individual and for society than a wider range of knowledge, useless or useful, without efficiency in action.

The Home is the Unit of Society

The home is the unit of society; within it are found influences and forces that are most potent in shaping the life of the individual, in determining the state of society and the character of the national life. From it have come the millions who constitute the population of this country. From it come every year more than two million new born citizens. Within the next decade there will be born more than five times as many children as there were souls

in this country when we became an independent nation, and two-thirds as many as there were people living in the United States when the civil war began. Through infancy, childhood, and early youth, the care and nurture of the individuals composing this vast army is a most important part of the work of the home. The physical condition, the shaping of tendencies, the character of habits formed, the mental and moral development of the child, the promise and potency of later life, are influenced most profoundly, one may say are determined almost exclusively, by the influences of the home life. Are these influences and forces of sufficient importance to demand intelligent effort to prevent their being left to the sport and play of ignorance or accident?

How much is involved in the two words *care* and *nurture* of the child! For its proper care, there must be intelligent action, and intelligent action must be based upon a knowledge of the physical organism of the mother and her child; of what is essential for both for the best physical development of the infant and, later, of the child considered solely as a healthy animal.

Duties of the Homemaker

It is thought to be necessary for a farmer who would raise hogs or poultry successfully to study the structure and organism of each type, the properties of foods best adapted for their development, the preparation of these foods, and proper times for feeding, and the variety and amount of food to be given at different times and for different purposes. Few realize how much more difficult is the problem of feeding the child. It comes into the world perhaps the most helpless of new born things. Of the two million children born annually, one in six dies before the end of the first year; one in three by the end of fifth year. Boards of health, physicians, and scientific experts who have investigated this subject unite in declaring that a large percentage of this death rate is due solely to ignorance on the part of those responsible for the feeding of the child.

It is impossible to say how large a proportion of the illness of adults in the home is due to the same kind of ignorance—ignorance of what is proper in food, of what is proper in its preparation and care, and of what is essential in amount and kind to meet the varying needs of the older members of the family.

Connected with this single problem of feeding the family is another of no small importance, and that is the economic problem.

The bearing of this problem on the different members of the family is one of vast social and industrial importance. Proper feeding of the family, when no account has to be taken of expense is a simple proposition compared with the proper feeding, when at every moment the lack of money makes wise choice and proper preparation of food a much more difficult problem.

The health of the different members of the family as affected by other causes than incorrect feeding is a matter of vital importance. Knowledge of the proper means for the prevention of disease through proper sanitary conditions in the home, proper care of the person, and of means for the prevention of bad effects from unavoidable exposure, immediate treatment in case of accident, and proper nursing in case of illness, are essential for the proper discharge of the responsibilities of the homemaker.

Sanitary conditions in and about the home as related to heating, lighting, ventilation system, water supply, sewage disposal, and care of drainage system, are factors affecting the health of the family.

The clothing of the family involving wise choice with reference to economy, adaptation to needs, durability, care, and pleasing effect, is another subject demanding a wide range of knowledge and skill in order to secure the best results.

The housing of the family, involving wise selection of furnishings and decoration, is another responsibility devolving upon the homemaker, requiring special knowledge of wide range in order to secure the highest degree of comfort and aesthetic effect at a minimum cost.

The development of the child's mental power and spiritual nature while in the home, in such manner as to fix tendencies and develop characteristics essential for the best and most complete later development, is a problem that may well tax the mind of the wisest individual.

This is a brief though fairly comprehensive statement of what may be regarded as the most important of the duties devolving upon the homemaker. That these duties may be discharged with efficiency is essential for the well-being of the home, of each individual in it, and of society at large.

Who is the Homemaker ?

Who is the homemaker? She is the girl who is to be educated today and who, as the woman of tomorrow, is to assume these responsibilities. The home is a universal institution; it is found

everywhere; practically every human being has come from it, and has been affected for good or ill by its influence, its direct or indirect teachings. More than three-fourths of the women of marriageable age assume sooner or later the responsibilities of the homemaker. It is the one occupation which is most universal for the woman. The perpetuity and well-being of the race depend upon the maintenance of the home and upon the proper administration of its affairs. As practically every woman looks forward to the time when sooner or later she shall assume the responsibilities of the home, (and, since for the great majority of them, that time surely will come,) and considering their importance to the race, it seems an inevitable conclusion that no education for the girl is adequate which does not take these responsibilities into account and provide for such instruction and training as shall insure their effective discharge.

It is sometimes argued that the place for the girl to secure this knowledge and training is in the home. The complete and sufficient answer to that argument is, that she does not there secure it, and that her mother is not competent to give such instruction and training, even if she had the time and inclination to do it, and if her daughter had the time and inclination to secure it. Every phase of knowledge indicated as essential for the proper discharge of the duties of the homemaker is capable of being organized for instructional purposes and it may be taught in the school. If it is not dealt with there, it will be dealt with nowhere in any adequate manner.

The woman's instinct is sometimes spoken of as a safe guide in all these matters, but in view of the results obtained, and in view of the truths of biological science, such a claim is too absurd for consideration. Not all of these matters have as yet been properly organized as pedagogic material, but this is rapidly being done. The great problem is to find a place in our present school organization where that work may be done.

It will doubtless mean the elimination of some subjects from the curriculum which girls have been required to study, not because the study of them best ministered to their needs, but because of tradition, harking back to the time when courses of instruction were organized for boys upon the theory of general culture and training.

We do not meet the situation by providing means for general culture of which at best only a limited number of girls can avail

themselves. We recognize the need of special education of the masses to fit them to do something well. We are pressing vigorously for the development of this special education for efficiency in action in the agricultural, commercial, and industrial world, but we are practically ignoring the claims of the most important vocation in which human beings can engage and in which a larger number are sure to engage than in any other vocation that can be named. We hear on every hand, the claims for special education for the eight million wage earners, women and girls, to fit them to earn a larger wage and to better their social and industrial condition. Too much cannot be said upon this point and yet we are ignoring the fact that by the majority of these eight million wage earners, the present vocation is regarded as temporary, a mere makeshift until the opportunity presents itself to assume the responsibilities of home life, and that for the assumption of these responsibilities they have had practically no preparation whatever. The woman is the homemaker, the wide range of activities demanded of her in this field of effort, the vital importance of these activities to all concerned, demand special preparation which she is not now receiving. The welfare of society, the well being of the nation, depend upon the efficiency of the woman in the home, and that efficiency depends upon special education for such efficiency.

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